

1. Burma or Myanmar? The Golden Land.

Burma is a loose pronunciation of 'Myanmar'. Myanmar is actually the original term, and there is an evidence for that in a stone inscription from 13th century. (This was briefly mentioned in Globe Trekker's (2010) documentary about Myanmar.). Myanmar, The Golden Land - Documentary - 02:22 - "Marco Polo was here in 1277 and described amazing golden towers, and as he said: "the fairest to be seen in all the world." And he dubbed this place 'the Golden Land'." I have found a similar information here in <http://www.myanmarkyansitmin.com/151204/myanmar-adventure-program-9>. However, when I try to find this in the original source, The Travels of Marco Polo – Volume 2,¹ I simply can't find there the wording "golden land". The problem with "golden land" is vast, and perhaps no less than the Burmese, Thais and maybe others too believe that they are the historical "golden land" of Pāli Commentaries. Pāli Commentaries contain the information, that the monks Soṇa and Uttara visited the Golden Land (*Suvanna Bhūmi*) to spread Buddhism there, being sent there by the king Asoka in third century BC. There are much more mentions of "Golden Land" in the Commentarial literature, and for their listing and brief translation you may see here - <http://ebook.iseas.kr/Suvannabhumi0301/files/assets/basic-html/page75.html> (and following pages).

I believe that even if Myanmar was not the "golden land" in the Buddha's time (which I however believe), it certainly is today. I remember that when we spoke about "Golden Land" at the University of Buddhism and Pali in Sri Lanka, the Sri Lankan monks there were so naturally accepting Myanmar as the Golden Land, that I even didn't learn about the associated controversy, so hot in Thailand and other countries that compete for that title.

2. The Buddha-To-Be Suggests Vegetarianism. And Scientists?

There are two *Jātakas* (stories of Buddha's previous lives) that seem to indicate that vegetarianism was either (indirectly) suggested by the Buddha himself, or it was the trend of the period when the stories were composed.

(1) *Dummedha Jātaka (no. 50)*²

"My vow," said the king, "was this:--All such as are addicted to the Five Sins, to wit the slaughter of living creatures and so forth, and all such as walk in the Ten Paths of Unrighteousness, them will I slay, and with their flesh and their blood, with their entrails and their vitals, I will make my offering. So proclaim by beat of drum that our lord the king in the days of his viceroyalty vowed that if ever he became king he would slay, and offer up in a sacrifice, all such of his subjects as break the Commandments. And now the king wills to slay one thousand of such as are addicted to the Five Sins or walk in the Ten Paths of Unrighteousness; with the hearts and the flesh of the thousand shall a sacrifice be made in the god's honour. Proclaim this that all may know throughout the city. Of those that transgress after this date," added the king, "will I slay a thousand, and offer them as a sacrifice to the god in discharge of my vow." And to make his meaning clear the king uttered this stanza:--

¹ <https://archive.org/stream/thetravelsofmarc12410gut/12410.txt> .

² <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bud/j1/j1053.htm>

A thousand evil-doers once I vowed
In pious gratitude to kill;
And evil-doers form so huge a crowd,
That I will now my vow fulfil. [261]

Obedient to the king's commands, the ministers had proclamation made by beat of drum accordingly throughout the length and breadth of Benares. Such was the effect of the proclamation on the townsfolk that not a soul persisted in the old wickedness. And throughout the Bodhisatta's reign not a man was convicted of transgressing. Thus, without harming a single one of his subjects, the Bodhisatta made them observe the Commandments. And at the close of a life of alms-giving and other good works he passed away with his followers to throng the city of the devas.

(2) *Nigrodhamiga Jātaka (no. 12)*³

Let the deer go to the block 1 by turns, one day one from my herd, and next day one from yours,--the deer on whom the lot falls to go to the place of execution and lie down with its head on the block. In this wise the deer will escape wounding." The other agreed; and thenceforth the deer whose turn it was, used to go [151] and lie down with its neck ready on the block. The cook used to go and carry off only the victim which awaited him.

Now one day the lot fell on a pregnant doe of the herd of Branch, and she went to Branch and said, "Lord, I am with young. When I have brought forth my little one, there will be two of us to take our turn. Order me to be passed over this turn." "No, I cannot make your turn, another's," said he; "you must bear the consequences of your own fortune. Begone!" Finding no favour with him, the doe went on to the Bodhisatta and told him her story. And he answered, "Very well; you go away, and I will see that the turn passes over you." And therewithal he went himself to the place of execution and lay down with his head on the block, Cried the cook on seeing him, "Why here's the king of the deer who was granted immunity! What does this mean?" And off he ran to tell the king. The moment he heard of it, the king mounted his chariot and arrived with a large following. "My friend the king of the deer," he said on beholding the Bodhisatta, "did I not promise you your life? How comes it that you are lying here?

"Sire, there came to me a doe big with young, who prayed me to let her turn fall on another; and, as I could not pass the doom of one on to another, I, laying down my life for her and taking her doom on myself, have laid me down here. Think not that there is anything behind this, your majesty."

"My lord the golden king of the deer," said the king, "never yet saw I, even among men, one so abounding in charity, love and pity as you. Therefore am I pleased with you. Arise! I spare the lives both of you and of her."

"Though two be spared, what shall the rest do, O king of men?" "I spare their lives too, my lord." "Sire, only the deer in your pleasance will thus have gained immunity; what shall all the rest do?" "Their lives too I spare, my lord." "Sire, deer will thus be safe; but what will the rest of four-footed creatures do?" [152]. "I spare their lives too, my lord." "Sire, four-footed creatures will thus be safe; but what will the flocks of birds do?" "They too shall be spared, my lord." "Sire, birds will thus be safe; but what will the fishes do, who live in the water?" "I spare their lives also, my lord."

³ <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bud/j1/j1015.htm>

After thus interceding with the king for the lives of all creatures, the Great Being arose, established the king in the Five Commandments, saying, "Walk in righteousness, great king. Walk in righteousness and justice towards parents, children, townsmen, and countryfolk, so that when this earthly body is dissolved, you may enter the bliss of heaven." Thus, with the grace and charm that marks a Buddha, did he teach the Truth to the king. A few days he tarried in the pleasaunce for the king's instruction, and then with his attendant herd he passed into the forest again.

The Buddha (in *Vin. 2.10. Sarighabheda Sikkhāpada*) explains to Devadatta that He prohibited that kind of meat, of which animal has been seen, heard, or suspected to be killed for the monk, to who it is offered. I have heard from my friend, a monk from Maharashtra in India, that domestic animals are killed there upon purchase even today. This of course is not the case in Myanmar markets and shops, where the meat is already killed. How can, however, monks ascertain that the workers in the slaughterhouse didn't ever think "may killing of this meat, which might be later offered to monks, bring me a lot of merit"? Unless a monk has sufficient psychic powers to know the intentions behind killing the original animal (which I suppose the Buddha had), it is not allowed to us to eat any meat whatsoever. Suspicion may arise, right?

Some people believe that monks ought to eat meat simply because they accept whatever is offered. The humble mendicants. But this was never true. Monks were never supposed to accept alcohol, gold, silver, poison, weapons, and uncooked rice. Similarly, monks are prohibited to accept human meat, horse meat, elephant meat, dog meat, snake meat, lion meat, tiger meat, panther meat, bear meat, and hyena meat.

The story of human meat eaten by a monk is very illustrative of how a much should be suspicious about the origin of any meat he ever receives:

"Now at that time a certain monk had drunk a purgative. Then that monk spoke to the woman lay-follower, Suppiyā, thus: "I have drunk a purgative, sister. I need meat-broth." She said: "Very well, master, it shall be conveyed (to you)," and having gone to her house, she enjoined a servant, saying: "Go, good fellow, find meat that is to hand." "Yes, lady," but that man, having answered the woman lay-follower Suppiyā in assent, touring the whole of Benares, saw no meat that was to hand. Then that man approached the woman lay-follower Suppiyā; having approached the woman lay-follower Suppiyā, he spoke thus: "There is no meat, lady, that is ready to hand; today is a non-slaughter (day)."

Then it occurred to the woman lay-follower, Suppiyā: "If that ill monk is unable to obtain meat-broth his affliction will greatly increase or he will pass away. It is not fitting in me, that I, having answered him in assent, should not have meat-broth conveyed", and having taken a butcher's knife, having cut flesh from her thigh, she gave it to a slave-woman, saying: "Come now, having prepared this meat—in such and such a dwelling place there is an ill monk, you may give it to him, and if anyone asks for me, let it be known that I am ill," and having wrapped her upper robe round her thigh, having entered an inner room, she lay down on a couch.

...

Then the Lord on this occasion, in this connection, having had the Order of monks convened, questioned the monks, saying: "Who, monks, asked the woman lay-follower Suppiyā for meat?" When he had spoken thus, that monk spoke thus to the Lord: "I, Lord, asked the woman lay-follower Suppiyā for meat." "Has it been conveyed (to you), monk?" "It has been conveyed, Lord." "Did you, monk, make use of it?" "I, Lord, made use of it." "Did you, monk, inquire about it?" "I, Lord, did not inquire about it." The enlightened

one, the Lord rebuked him, saying: "How can you, foolish man, make use of meat without having inquired about it? Foolish man, human flesh has been made use of by you. It is not, foolish man, for pleasing those who are not (yet) pleased ..."⁴

So, in the Buddha's words, a monk is a "foolish man" (*mogha purisa*), if he makes use of meat without having inquired about it. Vegetarian monks would never have this issue.

Long ago my father shared with me that it is better for human not to eat meat – because human anatomy is not suitable for eating it. We are suitable to be vegetarians. In other words, human is a herbivore, not a carnivore. Is that true? I have found a lot of websites and videos that try to assert that we are originally herbivores, and that eating meat is an important cause of our cancers and many other diseases. You may like to see my selection below:

(website) <http://www.vegsource.com/news/2009/11/the-comparative-anatomy-of-eating.html>

(website) <http://www.stevehallinan.com/blog/2005/09/are-humans-carnivores-or-herbivores-2/>

(video-lecture) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ee25u3YccHk>

This website argues that we are actually omnivores:

<http://www.raising-rabbits.com/carnivore-digestive-system.html> . I however feel, that some of the arguments there are misrepresented anatomical information (such as that "dogs and humans have canine teeth" – not acknowledging the proportional difference in size, "length (of digestive system is) ... nearly identical in human and carnivore digestive systems." – not providing the particular measurements, etc.)

3. A Jātaka Tale Misused for Genocide

When we look at the history of many religions in the world, we find out that one way or another the followers were able to find an excuse for a war, at least as a protection of their country and the religion. Although on the first sight it may not seem to be so in Buddhism, there are such passages. In this little article I would like to share with you the *Jātaka* (a story of Buddha's previous life) which is well known among the Burmese people, and which is used as an excuse for the violent and merciless expulsion and genocide of Rakhine Muslims, so called "Rohingyas" (read as "Rohenjas"). The story does not directly say "kill" or "expel", but if it is skillfully misinterpreted, it may help to fulfil the sinister motives.

Bharu Jātaka (no. 213) - <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bud/j2/j2066.htm>

May all beings be happy,

Monk Sarana

⁴ "Book of the Discipline, I.B. Horner and Bhikkhu Brahmali, PTS and Sutta Central (downloaded version), 2014, p.1710 ff.